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Academic Performance in Writing Intensive Courses: Can We Better Prepare Transfer Students?

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The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences (FWS) at the University of Missouri is experiencing an increase in the number community college transfer students. Previously we reported data indicating these students, on average, do not succeed academically as well students who begin their college experience at MU. We are strongly committed to understanding why these students may encounter academic difficulty and designing academic programs to help them succeed. The Columbia campus of the University of Missouri requires all students to take 2 “writing intensive” (or “writing-across-the-curriculum”) courses, one of which must be in the student’s chosen academic major. FWS requires a third writing intensive course, which usually results in an additional WI course in the student’s professional curriculum, by definition an upper level course. Students transferring to MU typically miss out on introductory courses that are taught WI. Therefore, their first WI experience usually comes in an advanced course in their major field. Based on our observations while teaching some of these WI courses, we hypothesized that transfer students had greater difficulty with writing than non-transfer students. We present data comparing transfer and non-transfer student performance in WI courses taught within in our department. We also compared transfer and non-transfer student performance in non-WI, advanced courses for our majors. We conclude by offering suggestions for helping transfer students succeed academically.

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